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July 7, 1995

Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street, NW, Room 814
Washington, DC 20554

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Dear Commissioners,

I am Family Issues Chairman of Montana Association for Family and Community Education. Since the passage of the Children's Television Act of 1990 I have been active in an attempt to improve television programming for children. I have written letters to sponsors and writers of programs I found objectional, had meetings with the local TV stations program directors and wrote letters of support to sponsors of programs I found worthwhile (although many were removed from the schedule before I could zero in on the sponsor.)

I have read the docket of the meetings the FCC have been conducting and find that most of you agree with me that the intent of the CTA is not being met. I do not like to see any more government regulations than are necessary but I see no evidence of compliance. What I do see with the enclosed article is that the networks are providing less for children than they were previously.

Again, I hate to see more government regulations, but ladies and gentlemen, as long as broadcasters make profits from the public airwaves, the government has a right and an obligation to see that the privilege is used with some attention to the public good.

Please consider strengthening the CTA by clearly defining guidelines of educational programming by requiring a minimum of 1 hour a day of educational television to be shown in 1/2 hr. segments at a regularly scheduled time each day between the hours of 7:00 AM and 10:00 PM.

Thank You,

Gwen Thibodeau

Gwen Thibodeau
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If you want to see how television's so-called family hour has changed, take a look at Tuesday nights at 7 on ABC.

Right now, you can catch the extended family of "Full House." By the fall, there still will be a family in that time block, but this time it will feature the irascible "Roseanne," a far cry from the Olsen twins.

Whether Roseanne's family is suitable for yours, at least it's a family. When the network fall season begins, the 7 o'clock hour also will welcome the twentysomethings of NBC's "Friends" and the thirtysomethings of ABC's "Ellen," with nary a child to be seen or heard.

It's no coincidence that network television is replacing some shows aimed mainly at kids in favor of more adult-oriented programs, especially comedies, at 7 p.m., the prime-time slot traditionally associated with family TV viewing.

On the TV industry side, the changing face of the 8 p.m. schedule is a matter of competition, both with other networks and with cable channels, and of a desire to attract the 18- to 49-year-olds coveted by advertisers.

On the TV viewing side, it has to do with fewer families watching together and with a larger audience of young adults willing to check out an early prime-time offering.

And, the children themselves, more mature or perhaps just more exposed to adult-style TV fare, in many cases also are tuning in to the shows designed for their elders.

Although children themselves may not be bothered, those looking out for their well-being aren't necessarily happy with the trend.

"Seven o'clock ain't for kids anymore," said Peggy Charren, a children's programming activist who founded Action for Children's Television.

"In the old days, 7 o'clock was not breathtaking, but it was a safe haven," said Charren, who has fought to get television to provide "terrific" programming for children.

As is usual in television, the latest move toward young adults has to do with a few scheduling coups.

Last season, "Mad About You" and "Wings" on NBC and "Melrose Place" on Fox all fared well in the 7 p.m. slot, despite being designed for adult audiences.

That scheduling, designed to counter ABC's adolescent-oriented shows, achieved trend status last

month with the announcement of fall schedule changes at ABC, the network most strongly associated in recent years with shows oriented toward families with children.

ABC didn't just cancel such teen and pre-teen offerings as "My So-Called Life," "Full House" and "Me and the Boys"; it also decided to move the more adult-oriented "Roseanne" and "Ellen" to the 7 p.m. spot on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, respectively.

(In at least one case, where CBS is moving "Murder, She Wrote" to make room for "Cybill" on Sundays, the young-adult show replaces one aimed at older adults.)

"We've definitely acknowledged having made a shift," said Brian McAndrews, ABC's vice president of current series programming.

ABC has shifted the focus to "trying to get kids to watch adult-driven shows, rather than getting adults to watch kid-driven shows" like "Full House," McAndrews said.

That decision probably affected the fate of a show such as "Me and the Boys," which enjoyed decent ratings in its first year but was based too strongly on youthful appeal, he said.

The ideal place for that show would have been on ABC's TGIF Friday lineup, an island of programming aimed at children, but there wasn't room there, he said.

On the other hand, "My So-Called Life," a critically acclaimed show that was recently canceled, drew strong devotion from 12- to 16-year-olds but did not tap into other age brackets.

Oddly, ABC's "Home Improvement," which is perhaps the best current example of an "adult-driven" show that appeals to kids, runs at a later hour, 8 p.m., as does that network's "Grace Under Fire."

The strong cross-generational appeal of those shows is probably partly responsible for the later broadcast time, since they serve as "tentpoles," or anchor shows on which to build an entire evening's schedule, an ABC executive said.

As networks feel financial pressure to provide shows that attract young adults, it means that TV does not serve younger or older viewers as well, said Marcia Summers, associate professor of educational psychology at Ball State University in Muncie, Ind.

"Sometimes, I think we ought to be thinking about what's important to us as a society. But when money and family values clash, money seems to win out," she said.